

2009 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS

THE STATEWIDE FORECAST

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Statewide

The most notable change in deer hunting regulations for 2009 is the new crossbow regulations that will be in effect. Crossbows are now legal to use:

- During any season in which a firearm may be used, for both big and small game statewide.
- By anyone 50 years of age or older during the Oct. 1-Nov. 14 bow hunting deer season statewide.
- By any hunter age 12 and older during any hunting season, including the bow hunting season, in Zone 3.

A free crossbow stamp, available from all license agents or online at www.michigan.gov/dnr, is required in addition to a valid hunting license.

Another change that hunters should keep in mind is the reduced number and reduced dates and times of operation of Department of Natural Resources staffed deer check stations. This reduction is result of staffing and budget shortfalls being experienced by the DNR. A list of DNR deer check stations, hours, and telephone numbers may be found online at www.michigan.gov/dnr.

Hunters are also reminded that changes to several deer management units (DMUs) have been made for 2009. Deer management units 486 (all of Zone 3 except Kent, St. Clair, Macomb, Wayne, and Monroe Counties) and 487 (the six county bovine tuberculosis (TB) area-Presque Isle, Montmorency, Alpena, Oscoda, Alcona, and Iosco Counties) were created to provide additional flexibility for antlerless deer hunters. Also, two DMUs were each split into two smaller DMUs (049 becomes 249 and 349 and 062 becomes 162 and 262) to allow deer management to be more specifically applied.

The DNR would also like to remind hunters of changes that occurred last year that will still be in effect for 2009. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), an always fatal neurological disease of deer and elk, was confirmed in a privately-owned cervid (deer) facility in Kent County in August 2008. In 2002, the DNR adopted the *Michigan Surveillance and Response Plan for Chronic Wasting Disease of Free-Ranging and Privately-Owned Cervids*. The CWD Plan requires a ban on all feeding and baiting of cervids within the Peninsula where CWD is documented. This baiting ban is a prudent measure to help prevent the potential spread of CWD. The DNR is doing surveillance for CWD in Kent County. All deer harvested in the nine-township CWD surveillance area must be taken to a DNR check station and submitted for testing. Deer carcasses may only be removed from the CWD surveillance zone after receipt of a negative CWD test.

Another change that hunters should remember is that beginning in 2008 new Upper Peninsula (UP) "hunters choice buck tag" regulations were established. This regulation was presented to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) by the UP Whitetails Association of Marquette County. Hunters must decide, before purchasing their deer license, if they wish the opportunity to take one or two antlered deer. Those wishing the opportunity to shoot two bucks must purchase a combination license. Both bucks have antler point restrictions. One buck must have one antler with at least 3 antler points; the other buck must have one antler with at least 4 antler points. Those choosing to purchase both a firearm deer license and an archery deer license are limited to taking only one buck all seasons combined. See the 2009 Hunting and Trapping Guide for additional information on the regulation. This regulation only pertains to those hunting in the UP.

Deer are not evenly distributed across the state. Every year hunters only a few miles apart have very different experiences observing and harvesting deer. Even in the UP, where there are fewer deer, deer hunters should find 2009 very similar to 2008.

Upper Peninsula

While not as bad as last year, throughout much of the UP, the 2008-2009 winter had a negative impact on the deer herd. Snow depth and severity was sufficient to cause some over-winter mortality. In addition, the winter was severe enough to impact pregnant does. This impact will result in fewer fawns in the UP deer herd this year. With an expected reduction of the deer herd in 2009, fewer antlerless deer licenses are available in the UP for this year.

The production of mast (fruit and nuts) in the UP appears to be good this year. The plentiful mast, where available, will help concentrate deer and provide excellent nutrition for the upcoming winter. Hunters targeting these areas should have good success.

"The largest bucks with the heaviest and largest antlers typically come from agricultural areas, but nice bucks are also taken from forested areas where access is limited and they have an opportunity to grow older," said Bob Doepker, DNR Western UP wildlife supervisor.

More deer will be found in the Southern UP near Lake Michigan, with fewer in the Northern UP near Lake Superior.

"Distribution of deer will not be uniform with agricultural areas having higher deer densities, and public land and heavily forested areas containing fewer deer than the average for these areas. In general, hunters should expect to see fewer deer in 2009 than they experienced over the last few years in the UP," said Terry Minzey, DNR Eastern UP wildlife supervisor.

Review the buck hunting regulations put in place last year for the UP before purchasing your deer license.

Northern Lower Peninsula

Remember, baiting is not allowed throughout the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP).

The deer population for the NLP is expected to be similar to the last few years. “Despite a more severe winter this past year, deer came through in good condition. A few fawns were lost, especially on private land providing poor quality wintering habitat. Fawn production appeared to be good this spring although there were some reports of more does with only single fawns,” said Larry Visser, DNR Northwestern Management Unit wildlife supervisor. The number of antlerless deer licenses has been increased in some parts of the NLP, while no antlerless permits were available in several counties (Emmet, Cheboygan, Otsego, and Roscommon).

Hard mast production is reportedly poor in much of the NLP, although in the east part of the region, acorn production appears to be good in some areas. Wild growing apples appear to be abundant throughout the NLP.

Bovine tuberculosis continues to be a concern in the Northeast corner of the NLP. Ongoing TB management efforts require a large sample of deer heads from northeast Michigan to assess the distribution and rate of infection of this disease. “Bovine tuberculosis sampling will be challenging this deer season due to the reduced number of checking stations. We ask that hunters be patient as limited staff will work as quickly as possible to collect biological data,” said Tim Reis, Northeastern Management Unit wildlife supervisor. Slow, but important progress is being made in the effort to control TB in deer and it is important for hunters to continue to observe the ban on baiting and feeding and to harvest at least as many antlerless deer as bucks.

Southern Lower Peninsula

Remember, baiting is not allowed throughout the Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP).

The deer population in southern Michigan is expected to be similar to the last few years. Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across the southern Michigan landscape. This high quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, results in an abundant and productive deer population.

Deer populations in this region are generally far above DNR goals, and fawns generally come in sets of twins and triplets. High numbers of antlerless permits are available again this year with the added flexibility to use private land permits throughout most of the SLP (See the 2009 Hunting and Trapping Guide for information on DMU 486). Hunters are encouraged to harvest antlerless deer, especially on private land to bring populations closer to goal and to help address concerns of excessive crop damage and deer-vehicle collisions.

“Landowners and hunters both play a critical role in deer management. Working together, we can support responsible antlerless deer harvest and reduce ecological damage, economic losses, and social concerns in areas with an over-abundant deer herd,” said Sara Schaefer, Southwestern Wildlife Management Unit wildlife supervisor.

The amount of corn standing in the SLP always impacts deer hunting. Hunters tend to have the most success when most but not all of the corn is harvested. If half of the corn is still in the field, hunters not having access to corn fields will find fewer deer. If all the corn is picked before Nov. 15, deer change their patterns as they seek other forms of cover and hunters will need to look in

swamps and woodlots for deer. "It is anticipated that corn will be harvested later than normal this year, resulting in some large areas of standing corn," said Rex Ainslie, Saginaw Bay Management Unit wildlife supervisor.

2009 DEER SEASON FORECAST
Western Upper Peninsula Management Unit (WUPMU)
Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Keweenaw, Ontonagon, Iron, Dickinson, Delta,
Menominee, Marquette, and west Alger Counties

Bob Doepker: 906-228-6561

The 2008-2009 winter produced average snow totals across most of the southern and eastern portions of the WUPMU. However, snow totals were above average in the northern and western portions of the unit. The combination of early heavy snowfall and extremely cold temperatures (-10 to -20 degrees some nights) stressed the deer herd. Fortunately, weather conditions moderated in the southern areas in late March resulting in an average spring green-up and constraining over-winter losses to that of an average year. However, snow cover persisted in the northern snow-belt areas and deer surviving the winter were observed in poor physical condition. The severity of winter weather is a major factor determining the number, physical development, and productivity of deer in the WUPMU.

Deer numbers in the Western UP will be lower than last year, especially in the northern portions of the WUPMU. Deer will be most plentiful on the agricultural landscapes of southern Menominee, western Delta, south Marquette, and west Alger Counties. Much of this land is privately owned and permission is required to hunt on it. Private land antlerless deer licenses are available in the agricultural DMUs, and they can be purchased at a rate of two per day (limit two per year) until the quota is reached. These antlerless licenses are valid during all seasons with appropriate equipment to match the season.

Extensively forested areas exhibit lower deer densities when compared to agricultural areas. Within the primarily forested areas, deer numbers are highest in east Iron, southern Dickinson and Marquette, north Menominee and west Delta Counties. Quotas for public land antlerless deer licenses are usually lower than for private land and they tend to sell out more quickly. Generally, deer numbers are lower on primarily forested state, federal, and Commercial Forest Act lands, however, hunter density will also be lower, which some hunters desire.

Hunters will likely observe an average number of fawns and fewer one and one-half year old bucks this fall. The reduced number of 1.5 year-old bucks is due to the residual impacts of last year's severe winter. The largest bucks with the heaviest and best antlers typically come from agricultural areas, but nice bucks are also taken from forested areas where access is limited and they have an opportunity to grow older.

Fruit and acorn production is good to excellent across the WUP. The presence of an abundant acorn crop will attract deer to those areas that contain oaks. Advance scouting to locate areas where oak is present, will pay dividends to the hunter.

Unit Biologists:

Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Keweenaw, and Ontonagon counties

Bill Scullon, 906-353-6651

Iron and Dickinson counties

Doug Wagner, 906-875-6622

Delta and Menominee counties

Craig Albright, 906-786-2351

Marquette and west Alger counties

Terry McFadden, 906-228-6561

EASTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT

Chippewa, east Alger, Luce, Mackinac, and Schoolcraft Counties

Terry Minzey: 906-293-5131

The winter of 2008-09 was the second severe winter in a row in the Eastern Upper Peninsula (EUP). Snow depths in the southern portion of the unit were sufficient to result in a reduction of the yearling age class for the 2009 deer season. Additionally, the number of fawns observed in 2009 will be reduced from 2008 levels, as a result of the harsh winter conditions.

It is anticipated that the EUP will experience a fall deer population below that of 2008. Distribution of deer will not be uniform with agricultural areas having higher deer densities, and public land and heavily forested areas containing fewer deer than the average for these areas. Likewise, the southern portion of the EUP will have higher deer numbers, with the deer densities decreasing farther north.

The availability of antlerless licenses has been decreased in most areas of the EUP. Deer management unit 049 has been split into DMU 249 (the eastern portion of the old 049) and DMU 349 (the western portion of the old 049). Antlerless permits have been eliminated in DMU 249 and reduced in DMU 349. Deer management unit 121 continues to experience crop damage issues and hunters are encouraged to scout private agricultural lands and check with farmers who may desire fewer deer on their lands.

Fruit and nut production has been fairly good across the EUP. Unfortunately, due to beech bark disease, many private landowners (including the commercial forest lands) have been actively removing beech from their forest. The reduction in hard mast from this activity may well impact deer movements and activity on a local basis.

Unit Biologists:

East Alger, Schoolcraft counties, and Garden Peninsula:

Kevin Swanson, 906-452-6236

Luce and West Mackinac counties:

Kristie Sitar, 906-293-5024

Chippewa and East Mackinac counties:

David Jentoft, 906-635-6161

NORTHWESTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT

Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Wexford Counties

Larry Visser: 231-775-9727

Deer hunters in the Northwestern Management Unit (NWMU) should expect to see the same or slightly more deer than they saw in 2008. Despite a more severe winter this past year, deer came through in good condition. A few fawns were lost, especially on private land providing poor quality wintering habitat. Fawn production appeared to be good this spring although there were some reports of more does with only single fawns.

Deer numbers in the northern counties (Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau) are at goal; and private land antlerless deer licenses were made available in all of these counties in 2009. Leelanau County is in the seventh season of quality deer management regulation. Reduced harvest of younger bucks in Leelanau County for the past several years is resulting in an increased proportion of older bucks.

In the central counties (Manistee, Osceola, Lake, Mason, Missaukee, and Wexford), deer populations appear to be at or slightly above goal. Deer numbers are higher on private land than on public land. Some of the best hunting in these counties is typically found where agricultural land and forest land are interspersed.

For the south counties (Mecosta, Newaygo, and Oceana), deer populations are above goal in all areas except northern Newaygo County. In northern Newaygo County the deer population is at goal with more deer near agricultural areas, and fewer deer in areas of public land. Newaygo County was split into two DMUs because of differences in land use, productivity, and deer numbers. Southern Newaygo is also part of DMU 486 where abundant private land antlerless deer harvest opportunities exist.

The soft mast crop was heavily impacted by the drought this summer. Acorn production is spotty. Red, black, and pin oaks are producing acorns in some areas. Beech trees have not produced well. The wild apple crop is good to excellent. Antler development appears to be a little below average this year.

Unit Biologists:

Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Manistee counties:

Rich Earle, 231-922-5280

Lake, Mason, Missaukee, Osceola, and Wexford counties

Larry Smith, 231-745-4651

Oceana, Newaygo, and Mecosta counties

Pete Kailing, 231-745-4651

NORTHEASTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT

Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Oscoda, Crawford, Emmet, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Otsego, Presque Isle, and Roscommon Counties

Tim Reis: 989-732-3541

Deer numbers are down some in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Cheboygan Counties because of the hard winter last year. There are no antlerless licenses for much of the public land, so we expect less deer to be taken. We should see an even higher proportion of two and one-half year old and older bucks in the harvest this year than last year. Acorns are good in spots. Deer will be concentrated on food sources, early season scouting is important. New this year is DMU 487; this DMU includes Presque Isle, Montmorency, Alpena, Alcona, Oscoda and Iosco counties. Therefore, a private land antlerless deer license valid for DMUs 001, 004, 035, 060, 068, 071, 135, and 452 in the NEMU is valid for all DMU 487.

Hunters may observe fewer deer but more and larger bucks on public lands in Alpena, Montmorency, and Presque Isle Counties. Antlerless deer hunting opportunities remain good

across much of the private agricultural lands and in club country. Fewer twin fawns were observed this summer compared to previous years, which may be a reflection of the long winter.

Deer hunting in Crawford, Oscoda, and Alcona Counties is expected to be no better than last year due to the long, tough winter and what appears to be a poor fawn crop. A greater number of bucks are being observed by field staff this year from last. Lots of wild apples and scattered acorns will influence the distribution of deer during the hunting season.

The deer population in Roscommon County is expected to be slightly higher this year than last year. The population continues to grow going into the third year of no antlerless harvest on public lands and the second year on private lands. Moderate winter losses were observed after a relatively severe winter, but spring fawn production was very good. The acorn crop is excellent this fall, so hunters should concentrate their efforts where hard mast is abundant. Food plots on public and private lands should be productive with the warm September temperatures this year. In Ogemaw and Iosco counties, the deer population is similar to 2008. Deer are most abundant on private lands in the mixed forested/agricultural areas. Increased antlerless opportunities are available in Iosco County to reduce the population and prevent the spread of bovine TB. Hunters who harvest deer in Iosco are encouraged to bring in their deer to a DNR check station to have it examined for TB.

Ongoing TB management efforts require a large sample of deer heads from northeastern Michigan to assess the distribution and rate of infection of this disease. Bovine tuberculosis sampling will be challenging this deer season due to the reduced number of checking stations. We ask that hunters be patient as limited staff work as quickly as possible to collect biological data. Hunters can help with this effort by knowing the Township, Range, and Section (example: T28N, R8E, Sec.12) of the harvest location before coming to the check station. Buck hunters can also help by removing the antlers from their deer. However, it is important that antlers remain with the appropriate deer when registering these animals.

Very few elk are accidentally shot by deer hunters; however, those deer hunting in elk range in Montmorency, Otsego, Cheboygan, and southwest Presque Isle counties are reminded to be careful and avoid the unintended shooting of an elk.

Unit Biologists:

Alcona, Crawford, and Oscoda counties:

Elaine Carlson, 989-826-3211 Ext. 7030

Alpena, Montmorency, and Presque Isle counties:

Jennifer Kleitch, 989-785-4251 Ext. 5230

Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Emmet, and Otsego counties:

Brian Mastenbrook, 989-732-3541 Ext. 5430

Iosco, Ogemaw, and Roscommon counties:

Mark Boersen, 989-275-5151 Ext. 2730

SAGINAW BAY MANAGEMENT UNIT

Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac, and Tuscola Counties

Rex Ainslie: 989-684-9141

Hunters should expect a similar season in the Saginaw Bay Management Unit (SBMU), as experienced in 2008.

Deer populations remain at or above goal in the entire unit; and greatly exceed desired population levels in all agricultural areas. The distribution of deer is noticeably different on public and private lands, with greater numbers of deer observed on private land, particularly in agricultural areas.

Fawn sightings are reported to be average across the management unit. Based on the deer checked from the Youth Hunt this year, all indications suggest that the 2009 hunting opportunities should be as good, if not better, than 2008.

Timeliness of the agricultural harvest impacts deer hunting in the SBMU. Hunter success is best during years when most of the corn is harvested before the opening day of the firearm season. It is anticipated that corn will be harvested later this year, resulting in some large areas of standing corn. Although deer will still concentrate on brushy and forested cover types, the additional standing corn will provide more hiding cover and make hunting more challenging.

Acorn production appears average with a very scattered beechnut crop, and soft mast production is observed to be excellent, most notably apples.

Antlerless deer license quotas remain similar to last year. To help reduce impacts to crops, the entire portion of the management unit within the south zone has early and late antlerless deer seasons.

Deer hunters are urged to visit a check station to assist with disease surveillance and data collection vital to the successful management of local deer herds. Hunters wishing to check deer at Bay City are reminded that the office has moved next to the Bay City State Recreation Area at 3580 State Park Dr., Bay City, Michigan 48706.

Deer hunting opportunities exist on the many wetlands and managed waterfowl areas in the SBMU; however they may be limited during the waterfowl hunting season. Deer hunting is by permit only on the following managed waterfowl areas: Nayanquing Point, Fish Point, and the Shiawassee River State Game Area, as well as the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. Hunters are encouraged to call ahead for specific details concerning deer hunting on these and other wetland areas.

Unit Biologists:

Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Midland, and Arenac counties:

Richard Shellenbarger, 989-426-9205, Ext 7630

Bay and Saginaw counties Wetlands/Waterfowl Areas:

Brian Piccolo, St. Charles, 989-865-6211

Huron, Tuscola, and Sanilac counties:

Arnie Karr, 989-872-5300

SOUTHEASTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT (SEMU)

Genesee, Lapeer, St. Clair, Oakland, Macomb, Wayne, Monroe counties

Tim Payne: 248-359-9040

Throughout the management unit, deer are in good physical condition with good fawning rates being observed. This year, soft and hard mast crops appear to be good throughout the area.

The habitat of the management unit is diverse. Agriculture, with scattered woodlots and wetlands, predominates in the outer areas of Monroe, St. Clair, Lapeer, and Genesee counties, with the Tri- County and Flint areas being heavily developed. Between these areas, in and around suburbs, are pockets of habitat where deer do survive, which can provide hunting opportunities if you can get access to the land. While most of these areas are not open to firearm hunting; there are some areas that allow archery hunting. It is also where archery hunting is an important tool for taking deer in helping to control deer numbers. It is difficult to get access to these private lands and it takes a while for hunters to cultivate a relationship with the landowner to get it. New this year is DMU 486; this DMU includes the counties of Lapeer, Genesee and Oakland in the SEMU. Therefore, a private land antlerless deer license valid for these DMUs in the SEMU is valid for all DMUs in the multi-county DMU 486.

Hunters are reminded that many of the more urban southeastern communities have various forms of firearm closures. Hunters should contact their local units of governments for questions dealing with these closures. Hunters should be especially careful in hunting these more urban areas and be thinking safety at all times. Respecting the property rights of others is the way to ensure future hunting privileges for you and others. Do not trespass on lands of another without their permission. Hunting is still the most efficient method for controlling deer numbers and is an essential method for managing the management unit's population.

Reports by county:

Oakland, Lapeer, and Genesee counties:

Deer hunting should be good in Oakland, Lapeer, and Genesee counties. Weather can play a big role in actual harvest as it affects crop harvest and hunting conditions. Overall, deer numbers seem similar to last year. Crop damage complaints are up in Genesee and Lapeer counties, but this may be more of an indication of economy than increase in actual deer damage.

Lapeer County offers great deer hunting opportunity. Deer numbers are high, and the Lapeer State Game Area offers great public land deer hunting opportunity for those that don't have access to private land. There is no public land in Genesee County, but those with access to private land should see lots of deer. Oakland County has a mix of public and private lands, with highest populations on private. Highest deer numbers are in the northern and western townships.

Macomb and St. Clair counties:

Even though the spring was somewhat cool, it did not appear to impact productivity; expect a good fawn crop in 2009. The wetter and cooler summer impacted the soybean crop, but the corn crop is expected to be good. Natural foods, i.e., hard mast and fruits, appear to be plentiful this year. Expect deer to be in good condition heading into the 2009 season. Early fall conditions are dry, so expect the harvest of the fall crops to be early.

Macomb County is primarily private land hunting with the six northern townships providing hunters with the best opportunities to see and harvest deer. To access private lands, hunters will have to spend a great deal of time making the proper contacts and checking local ordinances. Overall deer numbers in Macomb County are up from 2008, with some localized higher and lower density areas. Expect a good buck harvest in this county.

Overall the highest deer densities in St. Clair County are in the northern half of the county. Deer numbers in northern St. Clair County continue to increase and are expected to be a little improved over 2008, with some localized spots with higher and lower deer densities. The southern half of the county will also have deer numbers similar to slightly improved over 2008; however some localized areas are expected to have slightly lower numbers. Buck harvest will not meet or exceed the 2008 harvest. The Port Huron State Game Area and the St. Clair Flats Wildlife Area (Harsens Island) support good deer numbers and should provide hunters with good public hunting opportunities.

Monroe and Wayne counties:

As a result of liberal antlerless regulations, the deer population in Monroe County has been at population goal for the past several years.

There are limited state lands in Wayne County, so most deer hunting efforts will take place on private lands. The highest deer population exists in the southwestern portion of Wayne County. Deer population levels in Wayne County are similar to last year.

For Monroe County the expected buck and antlerless harvest should be more than the 2008 season; however local crop harvest, hunter pressure, and weather may influence hunting conditions and overall harvest rates.

Unit Biologists:

Oakland, Lapeer, and Genesee counties
Julie Oakes, 248-328-8113

Macomb and St. Clair counties
Ernie Kafcas, 586-465-7214

Monroe and Wayne counties
Joe Robison, 734-379-9692

SOUTH CENTRAL MANAGEMENT UNIT

Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston,
Montcalm, Shiawassee, and Washtenaw counties

David Dominic: 517-641-4903

The South Central Management Unit (SCMU) deer population continues to persist well above desired levels. While the growing season of 2009 was cooler than normal and a dry spell occurred in late summer, there appears to be adequate natural food sources (wild apples, acorns, and preferred browse) and abundant agricultural food in south-central Michigan. Agricultural crops were used heavily as the numbers of both crop damage complaints and out of season shooting permits issued were once again very high throughout the unit. The expected buck and antlerless harvest should be similar to or greater than the 2008 season throughout the SCMU. The counties with the highest deer populations are Montcalm, Ionia, Jackson and Clinton. An adequate quota for private land antlerless deer licenses has been established in all SCMU counties in an effort to lower the deer populations in problem areas. New this year is DMU 486; this DMU includes all counties in the SCMU. Therefore, a private land antlerless deer license valid for any DMU in the SCMU is valid for all DMUs in the SCMU and valid for most DMUs in Zone 3 (those in DMU 486). The goal is to lower the deer population throughout the SCMU and private land access is the key to being successful. Hunters need to start scouting early and acquiring access to private lands. The early antlerless season was once again popular and hunters are encouraged to take advantage of the late antlerless season which will be open from Dec. 21 through Jan. 1 on private land.

Deer Season Prospects for Eaton, Ionia, and Montcalm counties:

The projected deer populations are well above goal for all three DMUs. It appears that populations in Eaton, Ionia, and Montcalm counties are stabilizing and the harvest of both antlered and antlerless deer should be similar to 2008.

Deer Season Prospects for Clinton, Gratiot, Ingham, Livingston, and Shiawassee counties:

Deer harvest should be similar to last year in these counties or increase due to a slightly larger population size. However, local crop harvest, hunter pressure, and weather may influence hunting conditions and overall harvest rates. Corn harvest may be later this year due to a cooler growing season. This could affect deer harvest as standing corn provides escape cover for deer.

Deer Season Prospects for Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee, and Washtenaw counties:

Deer numbers are still above the goal for these areas and complaints of crop damage caused by deer have increased in 2009 from previous years. Although complaints of deer damage have increased, the population itself does not appear to be significantly increasing, with numbers remaining at approximately the same levels as recent years. The trend for deer-vehicle accidents in the area coincides with this population trend.

Antlerless and buck harvest in 2009 for these counties is expected to be similar to the 2008 harvest. Hunters are encouraged to take more antlerless deer in these counties; the late firearm season will give hunters the opportunity to harvest additional antlerless deer. Hunters are also encouraged to inquire about hunting privately owned cropland, where damage has been reaching intolerable levels. In an effort to assist farmers in alleviating crop damage, it is

recommended that hunters asking for permission to hunt private property offer to take at least one antlerless deer before taking a buck.

Unit Biologists:

Eaton, Ionia, and Montcalm counties:

John Niewoonder, 616-794-2658

Clinton, Gratiot, Ingham, Livingston, and Shiawassee counties:

Dan Kennedy, 517-641-4903

Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Washtenaw counties:

Kristin Bissell, 517-522-4097

SOUTHWESTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT

Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa,
St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties

Sara Schaefer: 269-685-6851

Deer populations remain generally stable in the unit, but most counties have deer populations above established goals. Deer numbers continue to be very high in Barry, Calhoun, and Kent counties, especially on private lands. Deer are becoming increasingly numerous in suburban and residential habitat areas throughout southwestern Michigan. Legal deer hunting is an important aspect of deer management in these areas.

Crop harvest started in September and is on schedule this year in most of the southwest. Acorn and soft mast production appears to be variable to below average heading into the fall season due in part to cool conditions during the summer. As a result, deer may be found in pockets associated with food sources. Deer should continue to be in excellent physical condition.

Antlerless deer licenses are allocated by quotas in all the southwest DMUs, and all units have private land antlerless deer licenses. Hunters may purchase up to five private land antlerless licenses. Hunters are reminded that all counties in the Southwestern Management Unit are open for the late firearm antlerless season, and are urged to take advantage of private land hunting opportunities in these counties. New this year is DMU 486; this DMU includes all counties in the SWMU, except Kent. Therefore, a private land antlerless deer license valid for any DMU in the SWMU, except Kent, is valid for all other DMUs in the SWMU, except Kent, and valid for most DMUs in Zone 3 (all those in DMU 486).

2008 was an average harvest year throughout most of the southwest. In areas where deer populations remain above goal, the harvest of adult antlerless deer is an important part of responsible deer population management. Average fawn production in 2008 should result in consistent numbers of yearling bucks in most units.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) was discovered in Kent County in a penned deer facility in 2008. The implementation of Michigan's CWD response plan calls for additional surveillance of wild deer in Kent County. A nine-township CWD Surveillance Zone in Kent County, delineated in 2008, continues in effect and includes the townships of Tyrone, Solon, Nelson, Sparta, Algoma, Courtland, Alpine, Plainfield, and Cannon. All deer harvested by hunters from the CWD Zone must be tested for CWD. Heads from these deer must be taken to one of the deer

check stations inside the zone so samples can be collected for testing. Locations of these check stations and additional information about CWD surveillance efforts can be found on the DNR website. Deer harvested in the CWD Surveillance Zone of Kent County can not be removed from the zone without a negative CWD test.

Due to the finding of CWD in southwest Michigan, there is added concern about over-population, making it even more important that landowners and hunters work together to reduce deer populations in southwest Michigan. Hunters can contribute excess deer to Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger to process wild game for local families in need.

Access to private land is an important part of successful deer hunting and management in southwestern Michigan. Individual hunters can play important roles in maintaining hunting access. Please remember that courtesy, safety, and early pre-season contact with landowners are all vital parts of securing access to private hunting lands.

Unit Biologists:

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